

Black History Month has grown as a celebration of Black history and culture over many decades. At the urging of historian Carter Woodson, the second African American to receive a degree from Harvard University, the fraternity Omega Psi Phi first created Negro History and Literature Week in 1920. In 1926, Woodson changed Negro History and Literature Week to Negro History Week, and chose the second week of February for its celebration in order to honor the births of President Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass, two men who had a profound influence in the fight for equality for African Americans.

Although Woodson died in 1950, his legacy continued. In the early 1970s, the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, now called the Association for the Study of African American Life and History, changed Negro History Week to Black History Week. In 1976, they extended the week to a month-long observance.

Since its earliest origins, Black History Month has made a significant contribution to the promotion, preservation and research of Black history. When the tradition of Black History Month first began, Black history had barely been explored by mainstream academia. Although much work remains to complete our understanding of African-American culture, our understanding is vastly improved. This has contributed to both an increased sense of racial pride among African-Americans and an increased appreciation of African-American culture among non-White Americans.

Madam Speaker, these and other continued improvements are essential to addressing the inequalities, which continue to affect African-Americans. For these reasons, I am extremely pleased to commemorate Black History Month and encourage my colleagues to join me in doing so as well.

#### AMERICAN RECOVERY AND REINVESTMENT ACT OF 2009

SPEECH OF

**HON. JAMES R. LANGEVIN**

OF RHODE ISLAND

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Wednesday, January 28, 2009*

The House in Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union had under consideration the bill (H.R. 1) making supplemental appropriations for job preservation and creation, infrastructure investment, energy efficiency and science, assistance to the unemployed, and State and local fiscal stabilization, for fiscal year ending September 30, 2009, and for other purposes:

Mr. LANGEVIN. Mr. Chair, I rise in support of H.R. 1, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, which will save and create millions of jobs across our country, jumpstart our economy and transform it to meet the needs of the 21st century by making our nation more globally competitive and energy independent.

We are facing dire economic times. Every week, we are faced with new reports on job losses across our country. In my home state of Rhode Island, we have the country's second highest unemployment rate at ten percent and last December, we were ranked sixth nationally in foreclosure rates. These harsh realities have made it increasingly clear that our economy will face an even sharper downturn

if we do not act soon. With that in mind, I support taking action to rebuild our nation's economy.

H.R. 1 will appropriate \$544 billion for transportation and infrastructure upgrades and construction, health care programs, education assistance, housing assistance and energy efficiency upgrades, and includes \$275 billion in personal and business tax breaks for a total of \$819 billion to be expended over Fiscal Years 2009 and 2010. This measure helps those hit hardest by the economic downturn by extending unemployment benefits, providing job training to get people back to work quickly, increasing food stamp benefits, and extending health benefits for those who lose their job.

This measure provides \$90 billion to modernize our crumbling roads and bridges, increase transit and rail funding to reduce traffic congestion and gas consumption, and invest in clean water and other environmental restoration projects. It is estimated that Rhode Island will receive \$154 million for highways and bridges and \$39 million for the Clean Water State Revolving Fund, which will significantly raise and almost double our state's budget for these programs. These projects will immediately create jobs in my state, as projects will only receive funding if they are "ready to go" within 90 days of the enactment of this bill.

This measure also includes education initiatives that will build 21st century classrooms, labs and libraries through a new program that will modernize, renovate and repair school buildings. It is estimated that Rhode Island will receive \$48 million for Title I programs, which serve disadvantaged children, and \$48 million for IDEA Funds. H.R. 1 also provides \$15.6 billion for Pell grants, and it is estimated that Rhode Island will receive \$97.5 million in aid for 28,217 recipients for an average award for the academic year 2009–10 of \$3,456. Investing in our children's education not only has long-term benefits to our economy, but it also delivers on our nation's promise to ensure that all individuals have an equal opportunity to succeed.

I have strongly advocated for a comprehensive energy plan to lower costs, create jobs and improve our environment. H.R. 1 will not only double renewable energy production, but I am especially pleased that funding is included to build the infrastructure to transmit renewable energy to homes throughout our nation. The bill also promotes a Smart Grid Investment Program to modernize our electricity grid to meet the needs of our growing and evolving energy system. While Congress supports an efficient and modern system of power generation, the bill also provides necessary credits to individuals to make their homes more energy efficient through weatherization programs and with credits to purchase energy efficient appliances.

This measure includes individual tax relief, including the "Making work pay" tax credit, which will provide up to \$500 for an individual or \$1,000 for married couples filing jointly. Parents will also benefit from an increase in the earned income tax credit for families with three or more children and the bill allows for additional low-income families to receive the child tax credit. It will also provide a tax credit up to \$7500 for first time home buyers if they purchase a home between April 8th, 2008 and July 1st, 2009, injecting a much needed incentive into the housing market.

I also supported H.R. 1 because it includes unprecedented accountability and strong over-

sight by creating the Recovery Act Accountability and Transparency Board, which will coordinate and conduct oversight of federal spending under the bill. A website with the board's reports will be placed on a website, which will also show how funds are spent and list announcements of contract and grant competitions and awards.

Mr. Chair, it is important to understand that this funding is not a silver bullet, but that our economy will continue to decline without this immediate action. The Recovery package will begin to slow our downward economic trend and allow us to regain our footing as we begin to make much-needed long term investments to transform our economy for the 21st century. American prosperity depends on individual economic security. It is only when Americans do not have to worry about losing their job, keeping their home or paying their bills that our economy will truly flourish. I am committed to improving the economic outlook for the millions who are struggling, and I will continue working with my colleagues in Congress on this vital and urgent goal.

#### INTRODUCTION OF THE "MORTGAGE AND RENTAL ASSISTANCE RESTORATION ACT OF 2008"

**HON. CAROLYN B. MALONEY**

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Wednesday, February 4, 2009*

Mrs. MALONEY. Madam Speaker, today I am re-introducing "The Mortgage and Rental Assistance Restoration Act" for the 111th Congress. I have introduced this in previous Congresses and I will keep working to pass this important piece of disaster relief policy that will protect all Americans.

My bill would reauthorize the Mortgage and Rental Assistance Act, MRA, which was discontinued by the Disaster Mitigation Act effective May 2002. The MRA provides mortgage or rental payments to people who suffer a loss of income due to a federally declared disaster such as a hurricane or terrorist attack. Without a job, most people would be unable to keep their homes due to the financial burdens of mortgages or rents. The MRA provides cover for both home owners and renters.

After the terrorist attack on September 11, 2001, individuals who required temporary housing assistance relied upon the MRA, included in the Stafford Act, for aid. Under the MRA program many were eligible for grants to repair homes to a habitable condition, or to obtain mortgage or rental payment assistance to prevent foreclosures or evictions.

The MRA program was a crucial component to help victims of the Sept. 11th attack in my home state of New York. However, in 2005, in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, the MRA was not available for mortgage or rental assistance. As a result many people who would have been eligible for mortgage or rental assistance were unable to receive it. This was unfair and detrimental to the recovery process.

The United States government has a responsibility to help communities recover from unpredictable disasters and help citizens keep from losing their homes. The MRA program helps provide stability during unstable times and that is why it must be reauthorized.